

MEMORANDUM FOR DISTRIBUTION LIST

Subj: Soviet SSBNs as a Second-Strike Force

Problem: The question of whether the Soviets intend to "withhold" some undetermined number of missiles in a major nuclear exchange has been the subject of recent controversy. While intuitively such a strategy makes good sense, since no military commander would desire to disarm himself completely on his first salvo, the C³ problems of including SSBNs within such a strategy are immense. In the Soviet system in particular, where flexibility is not a known attribute, the concept of shifting targetting priorities, or selecting which missiles to release against which targets at the outbreak of hostilities seems highly unlikely. The question then is one of how to reconcile "withholding" as a sensible strategy with the Soviet approach to planning.

7 Discussion: There is accumulating evidence that the Soviet SSBNs have been relegated to some role other than as part of the overall major strike force. This evidence has been collected from unclassified writings, but based on the limited amount available argues for at least the possibility that all SSBNs would be "withheld" from the initial strike. Such an eventuality would resolve the C³ problems of coordinating the initial strike, would be in accordance with the standard Soviet war-fighting doctrine of "1st and 2nd echelon forces," would make eminent sense if -- as is likely -- the Soviets consider the positions of all of their ICBMs to be compromised and therefore vulnerable, and would give added credence to the widely recognized mission of the Soviet Navy to protect own SSBNs since these would become more vulnerable after the initial exchange.

Implications: If this is indeed the case, then the entire Soviet SSBN force may be viewed by them as a second strike force. Such a development would have major implications for U.S. planning bases. If such is the case, then:

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- Soviet strategy for nuclear confrontation remains totally dedicated to warfighting without regard for deterrence. This seems to underline a possible misperception at some levels that their concept might have been shifting to one more like the American views on nuclear war.